

The Readiness of the United States Marine Corps in OIF: Have Monetary and Equipment Shortfalls Prevented the Proper Support of the Individual Marine on the Ground?

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Submitted by Captain LB Butler
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Major JK Gelerter, CG 1
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Introduction

Expeditionary maneuver warfare (EMW) is the defining concept of the United States Marine Corps that allows the United States to project its power rapidly and effectively from the sea.¹ Hence, conducting amphibious operations from the sea are core competencies that contribute to the long-standing legacy of the Marine Corps. Unfortunately, not being funded properly is an additional tradition that has managed to follow the Corps as well. The Marine Corps is a sub-department of the Department of the Navy and is relegated to receiving whatever funds the Navy deems appropriate. This ad hoc attitude towards the Marine Corps' modernization efforts and most importantly, current worldwide operations have adversely affected the Marine Corps' force readiness. Specifically in the Iraqi theater of operations, the United States Marine Corps' force readiness has been significantly affected by a lack of vehicle armor, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) counter-measures, and individual body armor. Due to the current operational tempo, specifically the utilization of expeditionary forces in nation building operations in Iraq, and performing as the nation's 911-response force, the Marine Corps must receive more funding in order to support its development and production of vehicle armor,

¹ United States Marine Corps, *2005 Concepts + Programs*. Washington DC: Headquarters, US Marine Corps Programs and Resources Department (RPA) 2005, 2-4. Cited hereafter as United States Marine Corps, *2005 Concepts + Programs*.

improvised explosive devices (IEDs) counter-measures, and individual body armor.

The United States Marine Corps has always prided itself with doing more with less. This type of institutional thought has carried the Marine Corps through eleven major wars and numerous expeditionary operations around the world. The Marine Corps is the envy of the other sister services, even our own parent service the Navy, because of our efficiency and ability to complete missions with a modest budget. Unfortunately, current operations in Iraq have identified equipment shortfalls that have had a tremendous effect on the Marine Corps' force readiness in this theater. Combating insurgencies in Iraq, while promoting nation building, does not afford the Marine Corps the luxury to operate with a modest budget. In true Department of Defense fashion, all three major services tend to equip and train their personnel for the previous war in a stovepipe fashion. Ironically, one would think that we would be at an equivalent modernization level with the other services, since we fall underneath the Department of Navy; however, the Navy retains 23.7% of the allocated Research and Development (R&D) budget, thereby leaving a small insufficient 7.2% for the Marine Corps.²

² Secretary of the Navy, *FY 2005 Budget of the Department of the Navy*. Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, February 2004. URL: <http://navweb.secnav.navy.mil/pubbud/05pres/db_u.htm>, accessed 3 December 2005. Cited hereafter as *SecNav, FY 2005 Budget of the Depart of the Navy*.

In order to fund day-to-day activities adequately, the Marine Corps has had to shift funds allocated for R&D to Operations and Management. The Marine Corps only represents 13% of the total active duty force and receives 6% of the Official Military Budget (OMB).³ However, Marines make up a quarter of the ground troops currently in Iraq and are receiving thirty percent of the hostile casualties as compared to the Army's 67 percent.⁴

Vehicle Armor

During follow on operations after the initial Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, United States Army and Marine Corps service members began nation-rebuilding actions in very turbulent and dangerous conditions. There is a necessity to move troops and equipment all over Iraq in large convoys, which the insurgents have focused their IED attacks against. Vehicle armor was not an issue for the Army or the Marine Corps until August 2004 when the largest number of casualties occurred since combat operations began in March 2003.⁵ A majority of the casualties and wounded service members received their injuries from either rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) or IEDs while in high mobility multi-

³ Department of Defense, *Fiscal 2005 Department of Defense Budget*. Washington, DC: DoD, February 2004, URL:<www.dod.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2005/index.html>, accessed 3 December 2005, Table 6-6, 84. Cited hereafter as *DoD, Fiscal 2005 Budget*, February 2004.

⁴ Iraq Coalition Casualty Count. Web-only database. URL:<www.icasualties.org/oif/default.aspx>, accessed 31 April 2006. Cited hereafter as Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2006.

⁵ "Up-Armored HMMWV," (Alexandria, VA: GlobalSecurity.org, 2000), URL:<www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/hmmwvua.htm>, accessed 2 January 2006. Cited hereafter as "Up-Armored HMMWV," 2006.

purpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) or medium tactical vehicle replacement (MTVR) trucks.⁶ Currently, there have been 743 deaths from IED attacks against U.S. vehicles-(596) Army, (133) Marine Corps, and (14) other service components.⁷ Both the Army and the Marine Corps did not have the necessary armor appliques to support the eight thousand vehicles operating within Iraq. In an attempt to support the commanders in theater, the Commandant directed the Urgent Universal Needs Statement (UUNS) process in order to push much needed equipment to operational forces in less than ninety days. As of November 2004, 21,000 vehicles either received add-on armor kits or received the up-armored modification at a cost of ten million dollars.⁸ Even with Congress passing a supplemental funding bill for Fiscal Year 2005 to increase the number of Up-Armored HMMWVs in theater, the Marine Corps is still struggling to purchase the requisite number of regular unarmored HMMWVs.

Improvised Explosive Device Countermeasures

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) have been the weapon of choice for insurgent forces throughout Iraq since late 2003.⁹ An IED is a homemade device that contains materials that can be

⁶ "Up-Armored HMMWV," 2006.

⁷ Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2006.

⁸ "Up-Armored HMMWV," 2006.

⁹ "Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)/Booby Traps," (Alexandria, VA: GlobalSecurity.org, 2000), URL:<www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/ied.htm>. Accessed 2 January 2006. Cited hereafter as "Improvised Explosive devices (IEDs)/Booby Traps," 2006.

found in everyday household items. These homemade devices are made out of military explosives, artillery shells, or mortar shells which can be activated remotely by cell phones, two-way radios, or any other home electronic communication device.¹⁰ These devices have caused approximately 40.6% of 1829 hostile fatalities since the beginning of combat operations in Iraq.¹¹ Before OIF, landmines and booby traps were expected in conventional warfare, thus the individual soldier or Marine was required to be proficient in locating, recognizing and destroying these devices in various terrain. However, the insurgents have taken these devices to the next level by remote detonating these devices against vehicle and foot mobile patrols in towns. Since so many soldiers and Marines have been killed or injured by these devices, locating them early and preventing them from detonating near friendly forces is crucial.

There are two specific devices that could be used to protect US Forces in Iraq. The first is the Shortstop Electronic Protection System (SEPS), which was initially designed to prematurely detonate Radio Frequency (RF) Proximity Fused munitions before reaching friendly units.¹² Since a majority of

¹⁰ "Improvised Explosive devices (IEDs)/Booby Traps," 2006.

¹¹ Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2006.

¹² "Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)/Warlock Green/Warlock Red Shortstop Electronic Protection System (SEPS)," (Alexandria, VA: GlobalSecurity.org, 2000), URL:<www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/an-vlq-9.htm>, accessed 2 January 2006. Cited hereafter as "Improved Explosive Devices (IED)/Warlock Green/Red Shortstop Electronic Protection System (SEPS)," 2006.

the IEDs used are detonated via RF devices, this piece of equipment can reduce the number of IED attacks considerably, which correlates to a lower casualty rate. This device cost the DoD 8.5 million dollars initially in 1999.¹³ Currently, there are contract discussions occurring in regards to the production of smaller vehicle versions and portable man packs. The second piece of equipment is the Warlock Green system, which is similar to the "Shortstop" device.¹⁴ The major difference between the two systems is that the Warlock system has the added capability to jam enemy communications, once identified. The Warlock Green system has a total cost of approximately 30 million dollars.¹⁵

Body Armor: Interceptor Vest

Body armor has come a long way from the old flack jackets of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam eras. These jackets were designed to protect the wearer from "flack" otherwise known as shrapnel-pieces of fragments from munitions or pieces of objects scattered by an explosion.¹⁶ These jackets weighed on the average between twenty-five to forty pounds and were not designed to stop high velocity projectiles. Outer tactical vests (OTVs) or

¹³ "Improved Explosive Devices (IED)/Warlock Green/Red Shortstop Electronic Protection System (SEPS)," 2006.

¹⁴ "Improved Explosive Devices (IED)/Warlock Green/Red Shortstop Electronic Protection System (SEPS)," 2006.

¹⁵ "Improved Explosive Devices (IED)/Warlock Green/Red Shortstop Electronic Protection System (SEPS)," 2006.

¹⁶ "Interceptor Body Armor," (Alexandria, VA: GlobalSecurity.org, 2000), [URL:<www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/hmmwvua.htm>](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/hmmwvua.htm), accessed 2 January 2006. Cited hereafter as "Interceptor Body Armor," 2006.

"bullet proof vests" as they are more commonly know have been developed and are used by various nations due to their lighter, stronger, and cheaper materials, which can stop high velocity, small caliber rounds.¹⁷ The Marine Corps was in the process of procuring an OTV at the beginning of OIF. Due to budget restrictions, some units were forced to send Marines to combat either with the old style flack jacket, with the new Interceptor vest without the Small Arms Protective Insert (SAPI) plate, or with just one SAPI plate.¹⁸ This was due to a fledgling procurement process and the Marine Corps' decision to allocate some funding to individual Marine tactical gear concepts in 2002. Unfortunately, the program manager had to request a monetary waiver from Congress in order to purchase the new Interceptor vests with two SAPI plates for four thousand Marines enroute to OIF in February 2003.¹⁹

The Interceptor vest has saved hundreds of Marines' and soldiers' lives throughout OIF I-III. The Interceptor OTV has protected Marines not only from high velocity projectiles but from shrapnel due to IED detonations. However, there needs to be more emphasis on the development of body armor that can also

¹⁷ "Interceptor Body Armor," 2006.

¹⁸ Vernon Loeb and Theola Labbe', "Body Armor Saves U.S. lives in Iraq: Pentagon criticized for shortage of protective vests," *The Washington Post*, *MSNBC* (14 January 2006), [URL:<www.msnbc.com/news/1000971.asp?cpl=1>](http://www.msnbc.com/news/1000971.asp?cpl=1), accessed 14 January 2006.

¹⁹ Lowe, Christian, "The Marines' flawed body armor." *Marinetimes*. Online Edition., 9 May 2005, [URL:<www.marinetimes.com/print.php?f=1-292925-832873.php>](http://www.marinetimes.com/print.php?f=1-292925-832873.php), accessed 3 January 2006.

protect an individual's extremities and upper torso. A Pentagon study found that eighty percent of the Marines who have been killed in Iraq could have survived their wounds if they had additional body armor.²⁰ The New York Times reports that the Marine Corps requested that a study be conducted by a medical examiner in order to produce additional injury data which would be used to improve the current design of the Interceptor vest.²¹ However, due to budget constraints, the Marine Corps could not fund the \$107,000.00 study until December of 2004.²² The author personally deployed to Iraq for initial combat operations with one SAPI plate due to a lack of funding.

Financial Role of the Navy

The Department of the Navy had a budget of 119.4 billion dollars, which was 29.7% of the Official Military Budget (OMB).²³ The Department of the Navy allocated 16.3 billion dollars or 23.7% for its Research, Development, Testing, and Evaluation (RDT&E) budget.²⁴ Out of the 16.3 billion dollars, the Marine Corps was only allocated 1.2 billion dollars for the procurement of new weapon systems and technologies.²⁵ This is only 0.3% of

²⁰ Moss, Michael, "Pentagon Study Links Fatalities to Body Armor," *New York Times*, 7 January 2006, Late Edition, ProQuest accessed 14 January 2006.

²¹ Moss, *New York Times*, 14 January 2006.

²² Moss, *New York Times*, 14 January 2006.

²³ DoD, *Fiscal 2005 Budget, February 2004*, Table 6-3, 79.

²⁴ DoD, *Fiscal 2005 Budget, February 2004*, Table 6-6, 84.

²⁵ SecNav, *FY 2005 Budget of the Department of the Navy*, February 2004, Table P-1, 71.

the Department of Defense's OMB and 7.2% of Department of Navy's RDT&E budget. Some in Congress will argue that the Marine Corps receives ample funding due to the amount of monetary support from the Department of the Navy for aviation operations, health services/corpsmen, and most importantly, special multi-service procurement programs.²⁶ The remaining programs that are Marine Corps specific are forced to be developed when funding can be re-allocated by the Commandant. Some would argue that because of the Navy's support, the Marine Corps is given an excessive amount of funds. Colonel Mark A. Brilakis states, "The reality is that 1.2 billion dollars for procurement and testing is not that much, and portions of it could potentially go to pay for the military personnel division (MILPERS), within Manpower."²⁷ "This is the greatest requirement that has to be funded with "today dollars" and tends to take options away from the Marine Corps in regards to program development," concludes Colonel Brilakis.²⁸

There are several other programs out of many that obligate valuable funds from much needed programs that have and can continue to provide a great deal of support to the Marines on the ground. The first is the Joint Tactical Radio System (JTRS),

²⁶ Brilakis, Mark A., Colonel, USMC. Former Branch Head Program Development & Coordination, HQMC, Programs and Resources, Quantico, VA. Interview by author, 5 December 2005. Cited hereafter as Colonel Brilakis Interview, December 2005.

²⁷ Colonel Brilakis Interview, December 2005.

²⁸ Colonel Brilakis Interview, December 2005.

which will initially cost 26 million dollars.²⁹ The second is the Expeditionary Fire Support System (EFSS) and its ammunition, which has to be created and tested due to the mortar's rifled barrel. All 120mm mortar rounds currently in the Army and Marine Corps inventory are designed for smooth bore mortars not rifled bores. The FY 2006 cost of this program is thirteen million dollars.³⁰ Lastly, the EA-6B program cost the Marine Corps money through commissioning and training officers to fly the aircraft, even though the Navy pays all other associated costs with the aircraft. The above mentioned programs, if eliminated, could considerably provide sufficient research funding for the new development of individual equipment that would have a greater overall benefit to the Marine in Iraq.

Undoubtedly, the Marine Corps is capable of operating wherever and whenever U.S. interests are concerned. However, in comparison to the Air Force, Army and the "Blue Water Navy," the Marine Corps still receives only a fraction of the Overall Military Budget and is expected to function on all fronts. This type of expectation has not only given the Marine Corps a false sense of bravado, but it has also seriously delayed the modernization campaign plan for updating the Marine Corps'

²⁹ SecNav, *FY 2005 Budget of the Department of the Navy*, February 2004, Table P-1, page N-34.

³⁰ Department of Defense, *Fiscal 2006 Department of Defense Budget*. Washington, DC: DoD, February 2005, URL:<www.dod.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2006/fy2006_pl.pdf>, accessed 31 April 2006. Cited hereafter as DoD, *Fiscal 2006 Budget*, February 2005.

expeditionary maneuver warfare fighting ability. Most importantly, the Marines who will be using the end-items on the ground in theater are the individuals who will feel the repercussions of inadequate equipment.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps has definitely taken a more substantial role as a military force provider and enhancer since September 11th. By its very nature, the Marine Corps has contributed greatly to the unconventional operations in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Because the Marine Corps is expeditionary by form and function, it is leading the way for the other services in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.³¹ With the increased operational tempo and the requirement to respond to any worldwide emergency that affects the United States' national security, the Marine Corps is performing as a true ground combatant force. Unfortunately, as the Marine Corps continues to perform numerous missions and strives to maintain the readiness of its personnel and equipment, budget shortfalls are beginning to affect the Marine Corps' force readiness. These shortfalls include a lack of vehicle armor, insufficient amount of protective gear for forward deployed Marines, and most importantly for Iraq, IED counter-measures. The United States Marine Corps must receive a larger portion of the budget to

³¹ US Marine Corps, *2005 Concepts + Programs*, 2.

prepare its Marines for the ever-changing battlefield of the present and future.

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